

# The Indian Frontier Administrative Service

## *Romanticism and Hostiles Borders*

### **Rousseau's Romanticism: The Philosophy of NEFA**

"I am not at all sure which is the better way of living, the tribal or our own. In some respects I am quite certain theirs is better. Therefore, it is grossly presumptuous on our part to approach them with an air of superiority, to tell them how to behave or what to do and what not to do. There is no point in trying to make of them a second-rate copy of ourselves,<sup>1</sup>" wrote Jawaharlal Nehru, the Prime Minister of India.

He was speaking of the tribal population of what was known as the North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA), today's Arunachal Pradesh. Though constitutionally a part of Assam, the Agency was directly administered by the Centre<sup>2</sup>, with the Governor of Assam acting as agent to the President of India. The latter was seconded by a senior officer<sup>3</sup>, designated as Advisor to the Governor of Assam.

Later an Adviser for Tribal Affairs was appointed. Dr. Verrier Elwin, the famous British anthropologist<sup>4</sup>, occupied the post for several years and helped the Government to define its policies for the 'tribal' borders.

In 1957, Verrier's concept of the development of these areas was expounded in his celebrated book, *The Philosophy of NEFA*.

Nehru wrote the Foreword of the book which became the Bible for the officers serving in the NEFA. Nehru explained: "My liking for them [the

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<sup>1</sup> See, <http://www.arunachalpwd.org/pdf/Philosophy%20for%20NEFA.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> The Ministry of External Affairs.

<sup>3</sup> Often ICS officers like Nari Rustomji or K.L Mehta.

<sup>4</sup> He later took Indian citizenship

tribals] grew and with it came respect. I had no sensation of superiority over them.<sup>5</sup>”

Nehru’s objective was to avoid two extreme courses: “one was to treat them as anthropological specimens for study and the other was to allow them to be engulfed by the masses of Indian humanity.<sup>6</sup>”

He further elucidated his own philosophy: “These reactions were instinctive and not based on any knowledge or experience. [Later] I began to doubt how far the normal idea of progress was beneficial for these people and, indeed, whether this was progress at all in any real sense of the word. It was true that they could not be left cut off from the world as they were. Political and economic forces impinged upon them and it was not possible or desirable to isolate them. Equally undesirable, it seemed to me, was to allow these forces to function freely and upset their whole life and culture.”<sup>7</sup>

That was a very romantic view of the border population; sixty years later, one realizes that it amounted to a segregation of a large chunk of the Indian population. It is only now, that slowly, very slowly, India is discovering that it has a border population residing in the Himalayan borderlands.

The North-East, particularly Arunachal Pradesh, has recently been in the news, though for the wrong reasons. Hopefully, a new awareness of the importance of the border population is coming to the fore; it is indeed a vital issue for the future of the nation.

During an interview, Kiren Rijiju, the Minister of State for Home Affairs, himself a native of West Kameng district in Arunachal, told us: “The yardstick is that the security of north-eastern states must be taken as a priority and then catapult the whole region into a developmental stage,

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<sup>5</sup> See, <http://www.arunachalpwd.org/pdf/Philosophy%20for%20NEFA.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

which will be at par with the rest of the country; especially at par with the western part of India.”<sup>8</sup>

It may take some time, but the process seems to have finally started.

### **Tibet Invaded: October 1950**

It is unfortunate that at the end of 1950, soon after China invaded Tibet, the relations between India, the Himalaya and Tibet came to a standstill. With the Tibetan uprising in Lhasa in March 1959 and the consequent flight of the Dalai Lama to India, these relations, which for centuries had been vital to the Himalayans, were shattered; Delhi's romantic policies had for consequence a neglect of India's frontiers.

Following the arrival of the Tibetan refugees in India in April 1959, the Chinese tightened their grip on the Tibetan plateau; it ended in a real tragedy for the Himalayan economy, cultural life and India's security as well. Because Verrier Elwin and Nehru only saw the anthropological side of the problem, forgetting or ignoring the strategic as well the economic aspects of the border development, it resulted a huge gap between the frontier areas and the rest of India.

### **The Indian Frontier Administrative Service**

As the outcome of Nehru's NEFA philosophy, the first Indian Prime Minister decided to create a separate cadre for India's frontiers, namely NEFA, Tibet, Sikkim and Bhutan. His ideas remained however rather vague for a few years and it is only in 1953/54 that the project started to take a concrete shape.

On April 4, 1952, Nehru wrote to Jairamdas Doulatram, the Governor of Assam, mentioning a 'special' cadre for the border areas: "I have indicated

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<sup>8</sup> See, our interview Kiren Rijju: <http://www.rediff.com/news/slide-show/slide-show-1-exclusive-kiren-rijju-we-must-strengthen-our-position-on-china-border/20140617.htm>

previously that officers dealing with the tribal people have to be chosen with extreme care; just as the average Assamese officer might not be suitable, the average ICS officer is usually equally unsuitable. In effect, we have to build up some kind of a special cadre. Apart from general policies involved, the approach has to be most sympathetic and friendly. The test of an officer is, how far he gains popularity among the tribes."<sup>9</sup>

Apparently, in the early years, Nehru was just thinking of NEFA, which included at that time, large tracts inhabited by rebellious Nagas<sup>10</sup>. The service was later extended to Tibet, Sikkim and Bhutan.

Three weeks after having written to the Governor of Assam, Nehru sent a note to Subimal Dutt, the Foreign Secretary. The Prime Minister again mentioned the service which two years later would become the Indian Frontier Administrative Service (IFSA): "The real question is of building up a cadre, specially selected and specially trained. Also of giving some measure of training to the local people locally for subordinate types of work. ...I think that Mr Verrier Elwin could be of great help to us because of his wide knowledge and experience and his human sympathy for these tribal folk."<sup>11</sup> Then, in 1953, in a letter to Bisnuram Medhi, the Chief Minister of Assam, Nehru began to differentiate between the tribal of Assam and those from the NEFA: "We have highly developed and progressive tribal groups in Assam, chiefly in your autonomous areas, and we have very primitive people in some parts of the NEFA."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* (Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, Teen Murti House, New Delhi), Series II, Volume 18; see:

[http://www.claudearpi.net/maintenance/uploaded\\_pics/SWJN\\_Volume\\_18.pdf](http://www.claudearpi.net/maintenance/uploaded_pics/SWJN_Volume_18.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Today Tuensang, one of the eight districts of Nagaland.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> A few years later, he said that the Monpa of Tawang was highly civilized. Apart from the Nagas and the Khashis, Nehru had only faint ideas of the different tribes living in the North-East.

It is where Nehru wanted to implement his Philosophy of NEFA: "These primitive people especially have to be dealt with care and friendliness and require expert knowledge which our average administrator does not possess. Hence the necessity for a specially trained cadre."<sup>13</sup>

The idea of a separate cadre was not appreciated by all.

First the Assamese realized that the move to create a special cadre would further separate the NEFA from Assam.

On 24 March 1954, Debeswar Sarmah, a Congress member from Jorhat in Assam objected to the setting up of a separate cadre. He argued that it virtually meant "segregation of the people of this region from plains people and this would be a grievous error as it would prevent Assam from playing her rightful and proper part in development of the region".<sup>14</sup>

The dual role of the Governor of Assam, as an agent of the Centre for NEFA and the constitutional head of the Assam State, has for years created friction between the elected Assam government, particularly the successive Chief Ministers, and the Centre.<sup>15</sup>

The next day in the Parliament, Nehru answered the Assam MP: "My friend Sarmahji has raised an objection in connection with the border question, that the new step taken by the North East Frontier Agency and the separate cadre created by the officers is not to his liking. I regret that he does not like it. But we have done this after much deliberation and I am convinced that we must follow this path and if necessary, extend it further."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* (Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, Teen Murti House, New Delhi), Series II, Volume 23; see:

[http://www.claudearpi.net/maintenance/uploaded\\_pics/SWJN\\_Volume\\_23.pdf](http://www.claudearpi.net/maintenance/uploaded_pics/SWJN_Volume_23.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* (Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, Teen Murti House, New Delhi), Series II, Volume 25; see:

[http://www.claudearpi.net/maintenance/uploaded\\_pics/SWJN\\_Volume\\_25.pdf](http://www.claudearpi.net/maintenance/uploaded_pics/SWJN_Volume_25.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> The Ministry of External Affairs.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

Nehru added: "The most important part of it is to make them feel that they are part of India and that their future lies marching forward hand in hand with the rest of the country. Once they are convinced about this, then we can cement relations further. If they feel at the beginning that we are trying to force a relationship down their throats, then it will be counterproductive." Lt. Col. P.N. (Pran) Luthra, who belonged to the first batch of IFAS officers and who like many of his colleagues came from the Indian Army,<sup>17</sup> explained the legal aspects of the cadre in his book *Constitutional and Administrative Growth of the Arunachal Pradesh*.<sup>18</sup>

He writes: "The cadres of Administration in NEFA generally fall under two heads. Firstly, the NEFA Civil Service which encompasses the posts of Circle Officers and Extra Assistant Commissioners and secondly, the Indian Frontier Administrative Service which was created in 1953 by the Government of India through special recruitment by inviting applications from officers from all walks of life as also the existing All India Services. In the course of the years, the officers of the two cadres with the support of those in the departmental services have played a signal role in extending and consolidating the administration in the entire territory of the Agency. Of late, however, the avenues of advancement in the Indian Frontier Administrative Service being extremely limited or practically non-existent, a portion of these officers were appointed to the Indian Administrative Service."

Luthra wrote this in 1968.

On September 18, 1955, the Prime Minister sent a note to Foreign Secretary in order to formalize the loose arrangement already in place; he tells Subimal Dutt: "I think that the NEFA does require special selection and,

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<sup>17</sup> Corps of Signals.

<sup>18</sup> Pran Nath Luthra, *Constitutional and Administrative Growth of the Arunachal Pradesh*, (Itanagar, Directorate of Research, Government of Arunachal Pradesh, 1971).

therefore, a special cadre is desirable.”<sup>19</sup> He mentions the objection of Govind Ballabh Pant, the Home Minister who proposed that the new Service should be amalgamated with the IAS, “as otherwise it might not give ‘enough room for promotion’ for the IFAS officers.”

R.K. Nehru, the Foreign Secretary wanted the service to be linked to the Foreign Service by creating deputation posts for officers to the new NEFA cadre.

Nehru did not agree: “I do not see why the special cadre should be a rigid enclosure. People can be taken from it for the Foreign Service or, indeed, for the IAS. These will be generally special cases. The necessity for the special cadre remains subject to this flexibility.”

Luthra further explains the administration of the NEFA before 1953: “While dealing with the services, it might be worthwhile to dwell briefly on the system prior to the origin of the Indian Frontier Administrative Service in 1953. In the former years, there was no special cadre or administrative service for the Agency. The Officers were drawn from the All-India or other service cadres of Assam. It was the Indian Civil Service, the Indian Police and the Indian Army which, in the main, provided officers for appointment as Political Officers and Assistant Political Officers. In a few cases, selected Extra Assistant Commissioners from the Assam State were also appointed as Political Officers and Assistant Political Officers. This was, however, an adhoc arrangement which has now been replaced by the constitution of a Union Territory cadre of the Indian Administrative Service.”

The Indian Frontier Administrative Service was itself adhoc and during the mid-1960s, IFAS officers were ‘merged’ into the IAS or the IPS.

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<sup>19</sup> *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* (Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, Teen Murti House, New Delhi), Series II, Volume 30; see:

[http://www.claudearpi.net/maintenance/uploaded\\_pics/SWJN\\_Volume\\_30.pdf](http://www.claudearpi.net/maintenance/uploaded_pics/SWJN_Volume_30.pdf)

A note in the Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru explains: "The initial recruitment to the Indian Frontier Administrative Service (IFAS), established in 1956, was made by the Central Government through a Special Selection Board (SSB) consisting of representatives from the MEA (as Chairman), and from the Ministries of Home Affairs and Defence, along with an expert in tribal affairs. Rule 10.2 (I) of the IFAS Rules, however, provided that even promotions from Grade II to Grade I of the Service should be made on the advice of the SSB. B.N. Chakravarty [Special Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs] in a note of 10 September [1958] pointed to the inconvenience of summoning members from Shillong for Board meetings and proposed revising rules accordingly, and dropping tribal experts altogether."<sup>20</sup>

Nehru did not agree to scrap the SSB. He wrote: 'I agree that the old Special Selection Board is not necessary for the promotion of officers within the Service. It is not worthwhile to summon the Adviser to the Governor of Assam to Delhi for this purpose. But the Board you suggest appears to me in effect two senior officials of the External Affairs Ministry. The representatives of Home Affairs and Defence will probably have a watching brief. I should have liked to have some outside help. This need not mean adding to the Board, but I think that we should have the definite recommendations of the Adviser as well as some expert in Tribal affairs such as Verrier Elwin. On occasions the Governor's advice might be taken."<sup>21</sup>

It has to be mentioned that several officers of the cadre served in Tibet: P.N. Kaul as Consul General of India in Lhasa, Maj. S.L. Chhiber as Indian Trade Agent (ITA) in Gyantse, later Consul General of India in Lhasa, KC. Johorey as ITA in Yatung and RS Kapur, ITA in Gyantse. Others served in the Political Officer's office in Gangtok.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.



## **Johorey, one of the pioneers**

K.C. Johorey who later became Chief Secretary in Goa was one of the first pioneers who joined the IFAS. He remembers that Nehru told the officers who had been selected to administer India's frontiers: "The staff must go along with the flag and the typewriters can follow later on. That is it, physically and literally," says Johorey.<sup>22</sup>

Johorey gives some details: "We had all met in Delhi [the first batch of 14 officers] and received some training there." Then, then the batch proceeded to Shillong where they were briefed by the Governor, the Chief Minister of Assam and various Heads of the Department: "We learnt the law and the local trait of each tribe; not that we learnt their languages in 14 days." And that was it. They were then ordered to join duty in their respective posts. Johorey and his colleagues, Captain U. Chakma<sup>23</sup> and Lt. Col. Rashid Yusuf Ali (the senior-most of the three) had no alternative, but to take their assignment by air: "We landed at Rowria airfield in Jorhat [Assam] and we waited. We could not walk to Along [today Aalo], there were no roads. The Brahmaputra River had eroded the banks and damaged all the approaches. There was no bridge on the Brahmaputra at that time and you could not even go by ferry boat to Pasighat," he still remembers.

He concludes: "Along had a very small hastily levelled air-strip. So, we waited in Jorhat for 14 days. Every day we used to go to the airfield, wait for the dense clouds to disappear and come back [because of the bad weather]. This happened for 14 days. One fine morning, the dashing pilot of the Indian Air Force told us: 'Let us board and take off quickly for Along'. So, [we]

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<sup>22</sup> Most of the quotes of K.C. Johorey are from personal interviews with the author as well as from the Oral History Project of The *Nehru Memorial* Museum & Library (Acc. No. 712, Part II).

<sup>23</sup> Capt. Utonkomoni Chakma wrote his name U. Chakma, 'U' being equivalent to 'Shri' in Burmese.

boarded the aircraft and reached Along. Each of us carried a small bag of some essential clothes. Captain Chakma was a very colourful person. I was surprised to learn that he was from one of the tribes on the Chittagong Hills, near Burma border, and knew Burmese and Bengali."

Yusuf Ali, U. Chakma and Johorey had been given the charge to 'administrate' the Siang Frontier Division with Along as a base. Later, a doctor was appointed and joined the 3 officers. Johorey evokes the first days: there were two houses, one for the *burra sahib*<sup>24</sup>, and behind another smaller hut: "The houses were really huts made of bamboos, palm leaves and canes. Even the tables and the beds were of bamboos. There were no mattresses, no electricity and no furniture. The houses were very clean and airy. That was all," says Johorey.

As for the food, they depended on the airdrop; the small airfield was used as a Dropping Zone. It is how the IFAS started.

All the IFAS officers interviewed, like Johorey or Brigadier (Justice) D.M. Sen, the first Judge Advocate General of India, who is now 100 years old, have still fond memories of their days in NEFA; they all have similar stories to tell.

Earlier, officers had been headquartered in Dibrugarh or Pasighat and they only occasionally visited Along (not to speak of the more remote parts of the Siang Frontier Division today under Upper Siang, and West Siang districts of Arunachal).

Pasighat was then a five-day journey by mule track: "Usually we arrived on the fifth or sixth day", says Johorey, who adds: "we kept on meeting the people to know their problems, aspirations and expectations."

After a couple of weeks, having 'comfortably' settled at the 'headquarters', they started travelling to remote villages: "Some of the villages were very

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<sup>24</sup> Yusuf Ali was senior to his two colleagues

new and no administration had ever gone there. They had never seen a coin. They had no medicines.”

The new administrators had a small protective escort of the Assam Rifles; in each NEFA district headquarters, the paramilitary force, then under the Ministry of External Affairs, had the responsibility to guard the government treasuries.

Johorey goes on with his fascinating narration: “We continued travelling and meeting people. They used to come with their personal problems and legal cases including land disputes. [For example] somebody had violated the tribal code which had the sanctity of law or violated the rules; and there were simple cases. Then, there was the distribution of salt.”

Earlier the tribal population had to walk for weeks to reach Tibet to get salt; sometimes, tribals visited plains of Assam to barter goods.

Such were the early days of the IFAS.

### **The illustrious Maj. Bob Khathing**

One of the most famous members of the IFAS is Maj. Ranenglao ‘Bob’ Khathing who single-handedly brought Tawang under Indian administration in February 1951. His biographer, Lt. Col. H. Bhuban Singh<sup>25</sup> describes thus the times, when the service was not even official: “Bob was picked up for this service. The service came to be known as IFAS (Indian Frontier Administrative Service). Many military officers and some civil service officers of adjoining States joined this service. In October 1950, Bob Khathing bade farewell to Colonel Freyer, IGAR (Inspector General of Assam Rifles) [in] Shillong. On joining IFAS<sup>26</sup>, Bob was appointed A.P.O. in Tirap Agency and

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<sup>25</sup> Lt. Col. H. Bhuban Singh, *Major Bob Khathing — The profile of a Nationalist Manipuri Naga*, (Pritam Haoban publisher: Imphal, 1992)

<sup>26</sup> The IFAS did not exist in 1951, it started informally in 1953-1954 and it was formalized in 1956.

was posted to Pasighat in November 1950. As stated earlier, the atmosphere in Tibet was tense with the Red Chinese invasion looming large."

This is one of the most fascinating and less-known episodes of the history of Modern India. Singh continues: "In January 1951, he was shifted to Kameng [Frontier Division]. Major Geoffrey Allen was the Political Officer. The Headquarters of Kameng Agency was located at Charduar at the foot hills in Assam. Bob was posted as A.P.O. of Sela Sub-Agency."

It was Jairamdas Daulatram, the Governor of Assam, who ordered the young Naga officer to go and set up the Government of India's administration in Tawang area. Only once the job was done, Daulatram did mention the 'military' operation to Nehru.

A couple of years ago, an Indian journalist Sidharth Mishra, wrote an article entitled, *Forgotten: The man who won us Tawang*, about Bob Khathing. It provided a fascinating and detailed profile of the Naga officer. Mishra explains: "In 1951, Major Bob Khathing commanded a force of 200 soldiers and re-established India's sovereignty over Arunachal Pradesh, much to the annoyance of Jawaharlal Nehru."

Lt. Col. H. Bhuban Singh, Khathing's biographer gives more details: "From Bob's side too, wireless messages after wireless messages were sent to Charduar<sup>27</sup>, Shillong<sup>28</sup> and onward to New Delhi<sup>29</sup> giving details of what he was doing. At the same time, he sought approval of Government of India for the actions he had taken and intended to take. Shillong and New Delhi were aghast with what Bob did. They must have preferred a peaceful, non-violent and Panchsheel type of approach. While Shillong was reduced to a mere post-office forwarding information only, lots of consultations and conferences took place in New Delhi and lots of tea were drunk without any decision. In

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<sup>27</sup> Assam Rifles headquarters.

<sup>28</sup> Seat of the Governor of Assam responsible for NEFA.

<sup>29</sup> Ministry of External Affairs.

the meanwhile, Bob was told by Shillong to be patient and understanding and above all, sympathetic [with the local population], as if he had terrorized the local people. He was further instructed not to precipitate a crisis."

Khathing's direct interlocutor was N. K. (Nari) Rustomji, the Advisor to the Governor of Assam for the Tribal Areas and through Rustomji, S.N. Haksar, another I.C.S. officer serving as joint secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs in New Delhi.

It was indeed the legal prerogative of the Governor of Assam to occupy any Indian territory under his responsibility and Tawang was definitely part of Indian since 1914.

There was nothing wrong to bring Indian administration to a part of India's territory, and if it had not been done at that time, it would be Chinese territory today.

Another point which is rarely mentioned is that the local Monpas were delighted with the arrival of the Khathing expedition. The Tibetan 'administration' only consisted in forcefully collected taxes, which the local people often could not afford to pay; the corvee tax (*ula*) was particularly unpopular. The first thing Khathing did was to do away with these unreasonable taxes.

Interestingly, for years the Chinese government did not react to the Khathing expedition though the first PLA's troops arrived in Lhasa in September 1951 only.

### **Maj. S.M. Krishnatry in Subansiri Frontier Division**

One extraordinary account of the life of an IFAS officer is the 'tour' report of Maj. S.M. Krishnatri in what is today the Upper Subansiri district of Arunachal.

Krishnatry and his wife Geeta have left us a detailed description of their adventure. Krishnatry, who had earlier been posted in Tibet for 7 years, writes: "Most exploratory expeditions in the tribal frontiers have been armed or armoured with heavy escorts much to the cost and suppression of human rights, occupation of their lands, burning of villages, molestation of women, looting of livestock, crops and banning of trade. This was the trend in Abor, Mishmi and Miri expeditions led by the British armed forces during the 19th and early 20th centuries. The tribes of Arunachal Pradesh thus fought back with stockades and their native resources. Peace was elusive due to revengeful bloodshed. Non-violence was not for the British. Marabai-Tsari expedition led by me was conducted with a difference. It was wholly unarmed and unescorted."<sup>30</sup>

The IFAS was to bring the Indian administration in Limeking, not far from the McMahon line on the banks of the Tsari chu (river). During his tour, Krishnatry encountered the feared Tagin tribe: "The Diaspora of the Tagin tribesman sprawled right along India's north-eastern frontier with Tibet along its extremities extending through the hidden valleys of their Bangni kinsmen of Kameng frontier and their habitats of the Khru, the Kamla and the Subansiri river basins and over to the Mara and Na Tagins on the border lines, finally merging their identities astride Siang frontier with the Monpa mix of Mechukha."

In 1956, the Tagin heartland was still an un-surveyed area, which: "must be identified with the higher approaches of the upper Subansiri river confluencing with Tsari chu and other feeder valleys right up to Migyithun in Tibet - their El Dorado where every twelfth year they were hosted by the

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<sup>30</sup> The quotes in this chapter are from: S M Krishnatry, *Border Tagins of Arunachal Pradesh : Unarmed Expedition 1956* (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 2005) and interview with the author.

Tibetan authorities for contracting a peaceful management of the Tsari-Rong-Khor (circumambulation) pilgrimage."<sup>31</sup>

Near Migyithun, the last Tibetan village, was the hamlet of Longju which, three years later, would become famous after the Chinese attacked the border post, resulting in several casualties from the Indian side. The incident was hotly discussed in the Indian Parliament; this event certainly marked the end of the *Hindi-Chini bhai bhai* honeymoon.

In 1956, Krishnatry says: "Marabai and the Na people had border trade with Tibetan Lhopas and, therefore, rarely seen on Assam side. The pocket of territory remained the last to be explored for want of takers earlier for fear of warlike Tagins. It was for this that my wife and I volunteered and planned an unarmed friendship expedition. She became the soul of this expedition." Geeta Krishnatry religiously took notes of her encounter with the villagers on the way to the border and entered every detail of their adventurous tour in her diary. It is a most remarkable anthropological and strategic document. The former Maratha Light Infantry officer explains: "I sought positioning ourselves at Ziro for a feel of the area, fully convinced along with Geeta that the bloody culture of armed legacy of British expeditions against our own people must end forever - punitive or retributive. And a human rights approach of love, humour and patience must be tried out to set a tradition for future administrative operators. I felt that a woman was a more secure safeguard against tribal onslaught, while Geeta was firm she would rather trust peace with tribals than with armed escort in our company." Still today, Krishnatry believes that, "this unarmed and unescorted expedition has served to be a watershed in the administrative history of Arunachal Pradesh and has, if it is to be believed by the cynic, set the pace for lasting peace between the tribals and the administration unlike the other tribal communities of the north-east region of India."

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<sup>31</sup> 1956 was a Monkey-Year, the year the Tsari *Rongkor* pilgrimage was organized.

He notes: "We took the plunge not unaware of the prohibitive passage through deep river gorges and towering missile like peaks. Bailey, Morshead, Sherrif and the Kingdom-Wards had to turn away dreading the Marabai and their formidable deep gorges."

From the Government of India's side, Krishnatry's expedition was triggered by the Achingmori incident. In 1953, a forty seven Assam Rifles' party had been massacred in what is known as the Achingmori massacre, no one survived. Krish, as his colleagues called him, explains: "Fresh on my return from Tibet, I had decided to face the sword of Damocles just when came the SOS to proceed in this multi-dimensional mission which had a far-reaching and permanent impact on peace 'keeping all around.'"

The massacre had happened 'halfway in our projected itinerary', says Krishnatry who adds: "My mandate was indeed as simple as it sounded supercilious: "Plan your own strategy and take as much force as you would need to thwart any designs to trespass Indian territory, enforce law and order among the recalcitrant Tagins in the Mara area and ensure peaceful passage of the pilgrimage; establish all administrative centre as near to the international border as possible."

He, like other IFAS officers, loved their freedom to take immediate decisions without referring to any boss while implementing the Government of India's policies in a truly 'flexible' manner.

Such was the life of the IFAS officers: "It was a tall order in the face of no worthwhile intelligence available from any quarter. I had to deal with the people and I loved ...to act as deemed necessary."

His agenda was simple, though not easy to implement: "This fairy tale is all about the multi-dimensional expedition reaching out to the last line of our administrative control with benefits to the last villages Limeking, Ging and Na enclaves in order to evaluate their living conditions on the borderline, cooling off of the Tagin trauma caused by arrest of the ring leader of



Achingmori massacre by two large columns of the Assam Rifles force led by Hipshon Roy and K.T. Khuma, my colleagues, keeping peace with the Chinese or Tibetan escort for the pilgrims who had to circumambulate through our territory and the Governor Jairamdas' dictate to consolidate the border - all in one, apart from the necessity of keeping ourselves on our feet."

The IFAS officers were pioneers and their attitudes and actions were to be a model for the future generations of administrators: "our main agenda was to lay down a pragmatic charter of behaviour for future generations following in the footsteps of time." It is very unfortunate that the IFAS has been today forgotten and the young generation of IAS has absolutely no clue about what the 3 batches of adventurous and daring officers did.

The tour accounts are fabulous anthropological documents. Krishnatry, like his colleagues in other Frontier Divisions of the NEFA recorded a world which does not exist anymore: "Tagins were individualistic and the largest Tagin house seen by us was one containing four heaths. Centuries of tradition and mythology of our tribes residing in Arunachal Pradesh had rendered their own accounts and descriptions of places, names and all else in their thought and culture to mix up the haze of mystery. Nevertheless all that remained and rendered into new forms is relevant and interesting."

'Krish' continues: "Tagins then were believed to suffer from endemic dissidence to authority. Tours and expeditions were a prohibitive thought.

But for us, the technology of love and tolerance applied to primitive and hostile perceptions of their mind-set was, in a sense, ultra-modern.

Anthropologically it turned into a path finder for future for dealing with the primitive mind ...where prices were not measured in weights and coins and currency notes had no value, where bartering levels and pricing were dependent on age-old free equilibrium unfazed by our economic trends and where coins had the only value for weaving them into trinkets and

necklaces-such was the unique world of brave Tagins. That a yak would equal to 5 swords and rock-salt in a sack, a quantity of *ambin* (rice) was dependent on their own values and leverage."

This was before the advent of a civilization based on money.

It was probably at that time, that the Government of India discovered that the Tsari pilgrimage was crossing over south of the McMahon before returning to Tibet. Krishanatri writes: "Those of us who had not studied Bailey and others' reports did not even know in 1955 in the NEFA outfit that these pilgrimages had in fact been regularly performed since the creation of Sun and the Moon and pilgrims were trespassing through this segment of Indian territory. Of this we came to know from Lhasa. The Dalai Lama had in fact performed the circumambulation ritual in 1900 over the Kinkhor or Chinkhor or Chunkhor circuit of the short pilgrimage around Takpashiri, with 11 staging huts for the stay of pilgrims which was an annual feature."

It was to be the last time the parikrama around the sacred Takpashiri mountain was performed. Since then the tense relations between India and China have not allowed the Buddhist pilgrims to cross over to India and the Tagins have been 'integrated' in the Indian nation.

### **Lt. Col. Rashid Yusuf Ali**

A few words about another remarkable IFAS officer, Lt. Col. Rashid Yusuf Ali; he is today 92 year-old and lives in Shillong (Meghalaya). Though he has difficulty hearing, his memory is rather good for his age. When we met him, our questions brought back old memories, which he admitted having forgotten.

He was delighted to hear that we met some of his former colleagues, S.M. Krishnatri, Har Mander Singh, K.C. Johorey, Anupam Dhar, I.P. Gupta, Brig. (Justice) D.M. Sen and others.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Personnel interview with the author.

Yusuf Ali had an extraordinary life. He was educated in England; his father, Abdullah Yusuf Ali<sup>33</sup> was a very famous Islamic scholar of Indian origin who translated the Qur'an into English. Ali's translation of the Qur'an is still the most widely used in the world. Abdullah married an English woman<sup>34</sup>. In England, the young boy studied Greek and Latin in school. He still remembers that with some of his friends, he used to visit Germany and France during the holidays. At the age of 92, he was still able to recite a poem in French, which impressed us a great deal.

In 1941, he was commissioned in the Indian Army,<sup>35</sup> and fought for the British in Burma. Yusuf Ali then served as Military Secretary of the Governor of Assam<sup>36</sup>; he later served in Manipur.

Like several other frontier officers, he resigned from the Army to join the service newly-created by Nehru in 1953-54. Yusuf Ali belongs to the first batch of the IFAS. He explains that though created in 1954, the new cadre was only officialized in 1956; but like most of his colleagues of the first batch he had already been posted on the NEFA frontiers. For 3 years Ali served as Political Officer in Bomdila<sup>37</sup>. He says what characterized most of the IFAS officers, is their long tours; they used to walk over long distances (sometimes for weeks) to visit the Indo-Tibet border or remote villages. He mentioned walking from Daporijo<sup>38</sup> to Along<sup>39</sup>, several days distance.

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<sup>33</sup> Abdullah Yusuf Ali, CBE, FRSL (14 April 1872 – 10 December 1953)

<sup>34</sup> Mother of Rashid Yusuf Ali.

<sup>35</sup> In the 3 Rajput Regiment

<sup>36</sup> Sri Prakasa who served as Governor of Assam between February 16, 1949 and May 27, 1950.

<sup>37</sup> Then, the Sela Sub-Division of Kameng Frontier Division

<sup>38</sup> Subansiri Frontier Division

<sup>39</sup> Siang Frontier Division

He also remembers walking to Sepla with his wife<sup>40</sup>. Officers of the IFAS were used to walk, he repeats; it is not the case today with IAS officers. An advance party would prepare the ground for the camp in the evening. They were used to this type of life; they enjoyed it.

They were aware that the administration of these agencies depended much on the *Gaon Burahs* (the local headmen) who were very efficient as the tribals respect them a great deal.

Ali is modest when he says the IFAS officers had not much work to do; he thus explains why on their return from the annual tours, they used to write long and detailed reports, very much enjoyed by the Prime Minister<sup>41</sup>.

### **Nehru and NEFA**

In 1949, Nehru was not overly worried about the situation developing in China. In a letter to John Matthai dated September 10, 1949, he writes: "Recent developments in China and Tibet indicate that Chinese Communists are likely to invade Tibet sometime or other. This will not be very soon. But it may well take place within a year. The Government structure of Tibet is feeble. A Lama hierarchy controls the whole country, the majority of whose population is very poor. Any effective attempt by the Chinese Communists can hardly be resisted, more especially as the greater part of the population is likely to remain passive and some may even help the Communists. ...The result of all this is that we may have the Chinese or Tibetan Communists right up on our Assam, Bhutan and Sikkim border. That fact by itself does not frighten me."<sup>42</sup>

This brings two remarks.

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<sup>40</sup> Today known as Seppa, the headquarters of the East Kameng district in the state of Arunachal Pradesh

<sup>41</sup> Nehru once complained to the Foreign Secretary (Subimal Dutt) that he was not receiving their reports any longer.

<sup>42</sup> See: [http://www.claudearpi.net/maintenance/uploaded\\_pics/SW13.pdf](http://www.claudearpi.net/maintenance/uploaded_pics/SW13.pdf).

First, Nehru had a poor opinion of the 'lama hierarchy'. In the 1990s, in an interview with the Dalai Lama, we asked the Tibetan leader if, in his dealings with the former Prime Minister, he noticed that Nehru believed that a small dose of communism was not bad for 'feudal' Tibet.

The Tibetan leader answered: "I think so, I think so! A big dose!" and then he laughed and laughed in his characteristic way. When we further asked him if he felt that Nehru had been very much influenced by advisors such as Panikkar or Krishna Menon who had leftist leanings and therefore, the 'liberation' of Tibet by Communist China, was something 'positive' for the Land of Snows, the Dalai Lama replied, "No doubt!" But in his compassionate way he added that it was not the only factor. "From the Buddhist point of view, there was an inner factor, the karmic factor too".<sup>43</sup>

But in 1956, when Verrier Elwin visited Tawang, Nehru had suddenly a great admiration for the Tibetan monasteries. He wrote to the Foreign Secretary: "On the Tawang area, Shri Elwin writes a great deal about the high level of culture, in some ways better than the kind of thing that we bring to them. I think that from every point of view, we should endeavour to encourage their present cultural ways of living and not interfere with them. Indeed we should try to fit in our work with this. I entirely agree with Shri Elwin that it is not right for our schools and other training centres to lead to a detribalization of the boys and girls in small or big matters."<sup>44</sup>

He even adds: "The school should be connected with the major monasteries which thus far have been the schools or centres of learning. The abbots or the senior monks might be associated with the schools."

He further comments: "Apparently, some of our officers have thought that ours being a secular State, we should not encourage in any way Buddha's teachings or contacts with Buddhist places of worship. I do not think this is

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<sup>43</sup> Personnel interview of the Dalai Lama with the author.

<sup>44</sup> *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* (Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, Teen Murti House, New Delhi), Series II, Volume 43; see: [http://www.claudearpi.net/maintenance/uploaded\\_pics/SWJN\\_Volume\\_43.pdf](http://www.claudearpi.net/maintenance/uploaded_pics/SWJN_Volume_43.pdf)

the correct view in these Buddhist areas. We should definitely keep close contact with the monasteries and help them in various ways. We should repair and rebuild them and generally show our interest in the ways of life, religious or other."<sup>45</sup>

This is indeed different from the often-repeated contemptuous comments on the 'lama hierarchy' in Tibet, though the education in Tawang monastery was in no way different from the one provided by big monasteries around Lhasa.

This brings us back to the Philosophy of NEFA, which was more a romantic concept than something grounded in reality. Ultimately, it harmed India's strategic interests.

The second point is about Nehru's remark that Tibet's forthcoming invasion did 'not frighten' him.

If one looks at the events between 1951 and 1959, one realizes that 'the philosophy of NEFA' though based on genuine human concerns, did not take into consideration the military and strategic aspects the region.

After all, Dr. Verrier Elwin, the guru of the NEFA, was only an anthropologist, and it was certainly not his duty to be concerned with other aspects of the border areas. Nehru probably regretted dearly to have neglected the preparation of the border defence for a romantic preservation of the 'tribal life'.

The fact remains that these officers who decided to sacrifice their careers to join the IFAS were all remarkable personalities and still today, even though the cadre does not exist anymore, they should be role models for young IAS/IPS officers.

One can hope that in the future, more detailed studies could be undertaken on the fascinating achievements of these daring IFAS officers.

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.



**A non-exhaustive list of the first IFAS officers:**

Col. P.N. (Pran) Luthra (Indian Army)

K.C. Johorey (Indian Army)

P.N. Kaul, (Indian Army)

Har Mander Singh (Indian Army)

Major Bob Khathing, (Indian Army)

R.K. Bharat Singh, (Indian Army)

Maj. S.M. Krishnatry, (Indian Army)

Maj. S.L. Chhiber, (Indian Army)

Lt. Col. Rashid Yusuf Ali (Indian Army)

U. Chakma, (Indian Army)

L.R. Sailo, (Indian Army)

A.H. Scott Lyndgoh

Hipshon Roy

K.T. Khuma, (Indian Army)